

Brief Guide

"The Most Beautiful Museum in the World"

Museum Folkwang until 1933

March 20 – July 25, 2010

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On the History of the Museum Folkwang

"The Most Beautiful Museum in the World" – so said Paul J. Sachs, co-founder of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, about the Museum Folkwang during a visit in Essen in 1932. And indeed, thanks to its excellent collection, it was the most important museum of modern art until 1933. The Museum Folkwang was also home to an extensive collection of objects from Non-European cultures over the last 4000 years, for Example from ancient Egypt, from China and Japan, from the Middle East and from Java and Oceania. This extensive collection, which Karl Ernst Osthaus had opened in 1902 as the Museum Folkwang in Hagen, was acquired after his death in 1922 by a group of companies and patrons for the city of Essen and merged with the municipal art museum headed by Ernst Gosebruch. The museum's very productive activities came to a sad end with the National Socialist takeover of power. Gosebruch was forced to resign in 1933. Under the direction of his successor, Klaus Graf von Baudissin, over 1450 works were confiscated as "degenerate" art, and then either sold or destroyed. Reconstruction of the collection began after 1945; a few paintings and drawings could be bought back. The concept set by Osthaus and continued by Gosebruch of a universalist museum organised along certain aesthetic criteria is being taken up again and presented in a new form.

2

The Human Image

The works in this room show representations of the human being in classical modernism. The earliest painting is Ferdinand Hodler's *Spring* from 1901, still part of the world of Symbolism but seen as a threshold to a new art around the turn of the century. It was acquired in 1905, the first of the artist's works to be purchased by a German museum. Oskar Kokoschka's *Duchess Victoria de Montesquiou-Fesensač* was the first ever painting of his acquired by a museum, in 1910. It is part of a unique series of portraits of friends and patrons, in which the young Kokoschka used experimental painting techniques to illustrate the feelings of doom in Vienna before the First World War. The self-portraits bear witness to the artists' self-conception in modernism: From Paula Modersohn-Becker's penetrating *Self-portrait with Camellia Branch* which shows the result of her interest in Egyptian mummy portraits, via Lovis Corinth's proud but sceptical gaze, to Giorgio de Chirico's self-confident performance as champion of the traditional art of painting. In this context, Marc Chagall's *Purim* occupies a special position. In the colourful, dreamlike village scene Chagall unites childhood memories, elements of Judaism and Russian folk tales.

3

Classics of Modernism I

The major works united here form the core of the Folkwang collection, which contained masterpieces by French and German artists unequalled by any other museum in Germany. Its large share of French art remained, however, controversial. The reactionary press used the acquisition price of 200,000 Marks for Manet's *Faure as Hamlet* in 1927 as an excuse to rail against foreign art. Daumier's tragic *Ecce Homo*, Manet's theatrical *Faure*, Renoir's dreamy *Lise* – these three masterly works develop dimensions of the individual in exemplary fashion. Next to them are the two bronze sculptures by Rodin. At the 1877 Paris salon, the nude figure *Iron Age* provoked a scandal: Because the youth standing was so true to life, it was said to have been cast on a living model. As the artist explained to Osthaus: The idea of the work was "the dawning of consciousness in lifeless material." *Eve*, a key figure in his major, never completed *Gates of Hell* project is human entanglement in knowledge and guilt. Van Gogh painted a number of portraits of the Arles postmaster Joseph Roulin and his family. The painting in Essen shows Armand, the postmaster's 17-year-old son. To contrast his yellow jacket, van Gogh chose a background of Veronese green.

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Henri Matisse and André Derain | New Sculpture

This room unites paintings by Henri Matisse and André Derain as well as turn of the century sculptures. Because of its special light the south of France, from the time of the Impressionists, attracted artists who worked outside, including Matisse and Derain from 1905. Both pushed the development of painting towards abstraction, like the Cubists,

arriving then, as in Derain's case, at a new representationalism. Matisse's *Still Life with Asphodels* was the first painting by the artist to be acquired by a museum, in 1907. Auguste Rodin in France and Medardo Rosso in Italy created a new image of the human being in sculpture. They were followed by Aristide Maillol and – with quite symbolist works – the Belgian George Minne. They, in turn, provided the starting point for Wilhelm Lehmbruck's inward looking forms. The sculptures, presented as a group of its own, bear witness to a multifaceted modernist idea of humans characterised as a sensual intensity and frailty.

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Role-Playing

Japanese Theatre Masks

15th to 19th Century

Traditional Japanese theatre masks reflect the spectrum of human facial expression. Classical Noh theatre was a highly stylized type of theatre that developed in the 14th century. Two forms arose which are still presented today. The serious Noh theatre often recounts tales from Japanese mythology. In contrast to that, Kyogen theatre had its audience laughing with its satirical, light comedy. Up into the 19th century, all roles were played by noble samurai. Only the main character wore a mask, always smaller than his face. The actors appeared in magnificent costumes, like the female kimono displayed here, and moved with dancing, measured gestures across the stage, accompanied by flutes, drums and choral chants. Together with demons, wrinkled grandfatherly figures and the fox "Kitsune" from Kyogen theatre comedies, beautiful women's masks and grotesque phantoms from the Noh theatre are on display here. Some of them were made by famous masters – as the maker's stamp on the back indicate.

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Offerings for the Hereafter

Coptic Textiles

Egypt, 3rd to 8th Century

The Copts were Egyptian Christians who split from the Roman imperial church in 451. They created their own culture. Their textiles are among the oldest preserved and are of immense significance as testimonies of art and art history. The Copts buried their dead in dry sand and not in tombs. The textiles buried with them were thus extraordinarily well preserved. The pieces presented here are, moreover, of exceptionally high quality, as they have hardly ever been exposed to light. Some of them date back to pre-Coptic times. In the motifs one can recognize riders, hunters with game as well as flying cupids. Characteristic is a free combination of Christian and antique mythological motifs with ornamentation. Since the 19th century, such textiles were bought from traders for European collections. As traders and collectors were only interested in the artistic ornaments at the time, the decorative fields were simply cut out from often completely preserved garments. The pieces shown here were parts and applications from tunics, cloaks or curtains. They come mostly from the Achmim-Panopolis necropolis in Middle Egypt.

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Offerings for the Hereafter

Sculptures, Vessels, Amulets

Egypt and Near East, 3500 B. C. to 200 A. D.

The Egyptian collection in the Museum Folkwang includes sculptures and reliefs, early stone jars, amulets and glass – from the pre-historical period to Roman times. Nearly all the objects come from tombs: a major driving force for artistic production in Egypt was a belief in the afterlife. *The double statue of the "Foreman of Amun's gold mine" Wersu and his consort Sat-Ra* shows a favourite type of depiction of couples. The hieroglyphs on the back are a prayer to Osiris, the god of reincarnation, but also contain threats against grave robbers. The stone reliefs – for example the *Lady with Lotus bouquet* – bear witness to the unique quality of Egyptian stonecarving in the 3rd and 2nd centuries B. C. The mummy masks in a mixture of Roman and Egyptian styles are not portraits – they were cast in series – but once ainted over they gained a certain individualism. Glass was the first artificial material invented by man. The earliest vessels were made using the "sand core technique": On a rod a core of sand or clay was formed and covered with molten glass. After it had cooled, the soft core was removed from the inside and the bottle could hold a few millilitres of perfume. Only in the 1st century B. C. did the invention of glass blowing allow the making of larger, thin walled vessels blown by hand and so the further development of glass production. The amulets shown here were probably hung on chains around the necks of mummies or wrapped in their bandages. They represent hybrid beings, although sometimes have almost abstract shapes.

8

Heirs of the Impressionists

In Pointillism, Georges Seurat divided colours into a countless number of individual points that together form figures and

Objects only when viewed from a distance. Paul Signac took up this technique in his painting and magnified the intensity of light in his works to a brilliant, luminous colour. Max Liebermann first worked with a parrot as motif in 1881. Some twenty years later he recalled these studies made in the Amsterdam zoo and produced the Folkwang painting. Despite his French models, Liebermann's work retained a noticeable realistic quality. Christian Rohlf had special ties to the Museum Folkwang as Osthaus provided him with a studio in Hagen in 1901. His exploration of the collection of Impressionist and Neoimpressionist art there led to his works such as *Birch Forest*.

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Classics of Modernism II

No other German museum had such a thorough collection of works by the founding fathers of modernism as the Museum Folkwang. The paintings by Paul Cézanne, Paul Gauguin and Vincent van Gogh were acquired by Osthaus (and one by Gosebruch) before the First World War. Cézanne's *Bibémus Quarry* was confiscated by the National Socialists in 1937; the museum was able to buy it back in 1964. Both of Cézanne's works show motifs from the Provence. He often painted both house and quarry. After 1875, Cézanne developed a technique of "taches", individual patches of colour set next to one another, allowing him to transcribe his observations of objects or landscapes into independent "pictorial architecture", thus providing a remarkable visualisation of light, space, depth and even scent.

All three of these major works by Gauguin were painted during the last months of the artist's life on Hiva Oa, his self-imposed exile. His art unites western painting, motifs from the South Seas and pictorial forms from other cultures, such as ancient Egypt or Buddhism, to a many-layered symbolism. It caught Osthaus's attention, whose museum placed a special accent on Non-European art. In *Barbarian Tales*, the young couple in the foreground are part of a moment of transformation, suggested by the path of clouds, a link to the heavenly world borrowed from Buddhist painting, while with the demonic form of his dead friend the diabolical makes an appearance. All three of van Gogh's landscapes were made in 1888/89 in Arles and Saint Rémy de Provence. By this time, van Gogh had fully developed his luminous colours and his technique of charged, thick brushstrokes. He saw the field in *The Wheatfield behind Saint Paul's Hospital with a Reaper* every day from his room in the Saint Rémy hospital, to which he had voluntarily committed himself after a number of epileptic attacks. In the reaper he saw the image of death, but as he wrote to a painter friend of his: "... this death is not sad, it takes place in bright light with a sun that covers everything with a light like pure gold." The garden of the hospital in Saint Rémy is shown in another painting and here, too, van Gogh saw in the tree with a broken branch a symbol of life.

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Ornament as Image

Islamic Bowls, Pots and Tiles

9th – 16th Century

The tile mosaics shown here from Moorish Spain enchant with their ornamental play of colours and forms. In it is expressed – as in all Islamic art – a basic religious tenet: in the pattern's harmony and symmetry is revealed the nature of God and the structure of the cosmos. On just a few objects, however, one can discover human figures and plants. Especially on objects from the courts one finds motifs from historical or literary tales. In 1908, Osthaus asked the great architect and later founding director of Bauhaus, Walter Gropius, to buy Moorish ceramics in Spain for his collection. Thus one of the most significant collections of this type, with over 500 objects, came into the possession of the Museum Folkwang.

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Veneration of the Dead

Oceanic Ceremonial Objects

For the natives of Papua New Guinea, these carved pieces were cult figures charged with mythical powers brought to life during ritual funeral ceremonies. With them the dead could reach the hereafter and transfer their spiritual power to the living. Making a *Malagan* figure was seen as dangerous as the carver came in contact with the hereafter. Certain animal and plant motifs in the *Malagan* figures refer to individual clans or magical traditions: The flying fish, for example, which one of the figures is holding in its hand, indicates the eloquence of a leader. The yellow-feathered bird, on the other hand, refers to rain magic. The so-called *Uli* figures (from central New Ireland) form a separate group. They are distinguished by the white painting and stocky forms. *Uli* means: "painted white". Typical for them is their dual gender: The *Uli* figures display their masculinity but also have breasts. They thus unite male and female principles to a holistic depiction of human power. Most of the sculptures shown here were made in the early 20th century, when this part of Oceania was German colonial territory. These pieces came to the Museum Folkwang collection through the mediation of the painter Emil Nolde, who himself travelled to the South Seas in 1913 as member of the "Medical-Demographic-German New Guinea Expedition".

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Perfection and Chance

Ceramics and Lacquer Wares

China, Korea, Japan,

2nd Millennium B.C. to 19th Century A.D.

This room brings together ceramic and lacquer wares from China, Korea, Japan and Siam from almost 4000 years. From the 10th century (Song Dynasty), potters competed to develop new glazing effects: the glory days of monochrome ceramics. The particular attractiveness of many vessels lies in their harmony of form and glazing. Japanese potters worked after the Chinese models and, influenced by Zen Buddhism, they made tea bowls that raised irregularities to an aesthetic ideal. Flaws were highlighted using gold lacquer. East Asian lacquer wares are distinguished by their flawless, shiny surfaces. They were made using the sap of the lacquer tree extracted from slashes and then processed. Black and red are the dominant colours. The objects were decorated with a high level of precision using a wide variety of techniques. The Chinese bowl stand from the 12th/13th century shown here is the oldest lacquer object in the Museum Folkwang collection. Inros, flat medicine holders, were worn by well-off men hung by a cord from their kimono belts and attached with artfully carved Netsukes. Both accessories were highly valued as collectors' items both in the west and the east.

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Shadows of Myth

Javanese Theatre Puppets

"Wayang kulit" is a type of theatre which developed on Java from the 11th century. "Wayang" means shadow, "kulit" leather. Punched from buffalo leather and gorgeously painted, the figures are moved on sticks by a single puppet master and made to speak using his voice. Traditionally a show begins, generally on a festive occasion, after dark and lasts until the early hours of the morning. The screen is lit from behind so that the shadows of the figures can be seen. Spectators sit in front of and behind the screen, with the places behind being the more privileged as from there it is possible to admire the colours of the figures. A Gamelan orchestra with singers, gongs and drums accompanies the presentation. The stories of the shadow theatre are drawn from two ancient Indian epics: the Ramayana and Mahabharata. The Ramayana tells of Prince Rama, an incarnation of the god Vishnu, and his bride Princess Sita, kidnapped by a demon king. The Mahabharata epic, on the other hand, describes the struggle of the five noble Pandawa brothers against their 100 cousins. In both myths good is victorious over evil after long, complicated struggles. Thus a world defined by opposing powers finds equilibrium. This is the true message of the "wayang kulit".

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Expressionists I

Hung centrally in this room is Franz Marc's painting *Grazing Horses IV (The Red Horses)*, the "figurehead" of the former Museum Folkwang in Essen. This painting is a key work in Marc's development towards a luminous, autonomous colouring. For Marc, animals were the true guardians of life; humans he felt were too ugly to be considered in art any longer. Ernst Ludwig Kirchner was supported early on through a number of acquisitions by Osthaus and later by Gosebruch – and the group of his works in the Folkwang was correspondingly large.

The first painting Osthaus acquired was *Portrait of Oskar Schlemmer*. In the 20s Gosebruch added, to the holdings from Hagen, *Modern Bohemia* (an autobiographical painting), *Dancing Couple* and *Five Women on the Street*. With the latter, Kirchner had begun his marvellous series of street scenes as an expressive report of modern urban life in Berlin. Wassily Kandinsky's *Improvisation 28* was painted in a decisive period for his work in which he made the transition from landscapes to abstraction. Although black lines, powerful colour fields and an extraordinary richness of extremely differentiated colouring strike on first, signs can be found indicating figures; mountains, church towers, rowers, a pair of lovers. Klaus Graf von Baudissin, the Folkwang director put in place by the National Socialists, sold Kandinsky's painting in the USA through German dealers in 1936 – before the "Degenerate Art" campaign of 1937 – as an "alien element".

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Expressionists II

In this room one discovers how intensively the Museum Folkwang was committed not only to French modernism, but also to German contemporary painting. Centre stage is taken by Emil Nolde's nine-piece Christ altar, a very controversial work from the beginning, which reveals the religious core of Nolde's art. When the work was shown in Munich in the "Degenerate Art" exhibition of 1937 as an example of "the mockery of experience of God", he protested in a letter to Goebbels, demanding the return of his property (only public property was confiscated from museums). The work was sent back to him without comment. Nolde's art was especially fostered in the Museum Folkwang. With his mediation of Oceanic crafts he, in turn, influenced the collection's orientation. His paintings *Masks* and *Still Life with Wooden Figure*, acquired the year they were made, bear witness to his intense study of "primitive" art in Berlin's Museum of

Anthropology. Among the artists whose work especially influenced the Expressionists is the Norwegian Edvard Munch. One of the three paintings that the Folkwang originally owned can be seen here, a somber landscape. As works by the "Brücke" artists – Schmidt-Rottluff, Heckel, Kirchner, Nolde – were seen as the epitome of "degenerate" art (as were Edvard Munch's works), they were removed from the museum.

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Modernism Cut Short

Oskar Schlemmer's and Ernst Ludwig

Kirchner's Wall Painting projects

Like in the 19th century, contemporary artists participated in decorating museums exhibitions during the Weimar Republic, between 1919 and 1933, as well. In 1928 Schlemmer was contracted by Ernst Gosebruch for the interior design of the room where George Minne's fountain was placed. Gosebruch set the theme: "the young men's movement". He was referring to a social reform movement from the turn of the century which had also pervaded Osthaus's Folkwang ideas. In three versions, Schlemmer designed young men in his vivid, abstract pictorial language. The designs shown here are part of the second version. The third version was destroyed. For the festival hall, Gosebruch's first choice was the "Brücke" artist Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, who he had known for a number of years and had constantly supported. The choice of theme was left to the artist. Kirchner produced a frieze to cover all the walls of the festival hall in which scenes from work and play were brought together in large figurative denseness. Thus Kirchner's colour intensive dynamic would have contrasted with Schlemmer's classical statuesque figures. Unfortunately both projects came to a sad end with the takeover by the National Socialists, who also forced Gosebruch to resign from office.